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Y EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPANDING BUILDING

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The Y Early Childhood Center had to recently build a new room and rearrange our configuration of our classrooms so that we could serve more children.

We, at the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA, take our commitment to the community seriously. We believe that we have a responsibility to meet the needs of those in the Grand Traverse area by providing the very best programs possible.

As most people are already aware, the Y works hard to offer the best in sports, fitness, camps, and family programming. Even though our Center has been open since February, 2009, many people don't know that we have also dedicated ourselves to providing area families with high quality child care.

We know that working parents in our region are in need of top-notch child care at a reasonable cost and we have set out to meet that need. In fact, in our six-county area, sixty-seven percent of children under the age of five come from households in which both parents work outside of the home. We are working to provide those families with a high quality child care option at our Early Childhood Center and the response from the community has been great.

Nationally, the YMCA is the largest provider of child care in the country and the Grand Traverse Bay Y is following suit. In fact, since just October, we have seen our enrollment increase by over 65%. Because of the high demand for our program we have decided to expand and just opened a fifth classroom in our Early Childhood Center this week.

We're excited about this growth and are thrilled that so many families are choosing to partner with us for their child's care and early education. We're proud to be able to offer a high quality, values-based program designed to meet each child's individual needs. With our new addition, we're able to provide classrooms for children from infancy through pre-k.

Our Early Childhood Center encompasses a classroom for Infants (birth-12 months), Young Toddlers (12-20 months), and Toddlers (20-29 months). Along with a Preschool (2 ½ - 3 ½ year olds) and a Pre-K (3 ½ - 5 year olds) classroom. We have a classroom for everyone. The facility is a 9,600 square foot building with its own gymnasium and outdoor playground. Our center is adjacent to the TART trail which we use to access the library for weekly story time visits.

The children in our center are able to grow, learn, explore, and play in a safe and nurturing environment that is set up for their success. We focus on providing students with an age-appropriate curriculum for all stages of childhood development from birth through age five.

We know that 90% percent of a child's brain development occurs by the age of five and we know what a positive impact we can have on children during those first years. We value and appreciate the opportunity to be a part of those formative years for so many children.

Our highly trained staff members know how to engage children in their own learning and are skilled at helping children develop a life-long love of learning. That caring, dedicated staff is our biggest strength. Their love for children and their commitment to providing the best care possible is the backbone of our program.

However, our work doesn't stop there. We're more than just what takes place within the walls of the Early Childhood Center, we are the Y. We build a sense of belonging within the community by giving families opportunities to get to know us and one another outside of child care. For example, we hold a Family Fun Night event at our center on the third Friday of each month. This event gives families a chance to gather together for a meal, fun activities, and a chance to socialize with one another.

Parents have told us that the accountability of the program was one of the factors in choosing the Y Early Child Care program. The program is part of the larger Grand Traverse Bay YMCA with its 65 programs, its Board of Directors, and its affiliation with the YMCA of the USA where this program is accountable to a larger program both locally and nationally. They have the security of a state licensed program and the rigor of the State of Michigan's approval process.

Our early childhood program is another example of our commitment to youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. We will continue to grow, build and develop the program to meet the needs of our families and employers of our region.

To learn more about the Grand Traverse Bay Y Early Childhood Center, visit our website www.gtbayymca.org, check out our Facebook fan page, or contact Dagny Monette at 421-3568.